

Fundamentals, Study 30. The Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:23-32)

by BS Poh

o The Lord's Supper is a means of grace which believers would not want to miss too often.

1. Like baptism, the special ordinance of the Lord's Supper has a *meaning* and a *purpose*. The *meaning* of the Lord's Supper is that believers are expressing fellowship with one another by their common faith in Jesus Christ.¹ As they physically consume the elements, they spiritually feed on Christ, by faith.² The *purpose* of the Lord's Supper is at least threefold, affecting *the believers, the church, and the world*. First, it nourishes the faith of believers by exercising their mind, heart, and will. The mind is engaged in remembering the death of Christ symbolised by the bread and the cup;³ the heart is engaged in covenant commitment to Christ;⁴ and the will is engaged in repentance of past sins, resolve to love God's people, and desire for future obedience and usefulness in service "till He comes".⁵ Second, the church demonstrates its unity by its fellowship with Christ.⁶ Third, the Lord's Supper also has a witnessing function like baptism, reminding non-believers of the gospel of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" and the necessity of "discerning the Lord's body" without which they will be eating and drinking "in an unworthy manner".⁷ (1. 1 Cor 10:16-17; 2. Matt 26:26-27; John 6:51-58; 3. 1 Cor 11:24, 25; Matt 26:28-29; 4. 1 Cor 10:21-22; 5. 1 Cor 5:7-8; 11:26; Matt 5:23-24; 6. 1 Cor 10:16-17; 12:12-14; John 17:20-23; 7. 1 Cor 11:26)
2. The elements are bread and the cup, which symbolise the body and blood of Christ, respectively.⁸ Significantly the New Testament refers to "the cup" and "fruit of the vine" (grape juice, not necessarily fermented) for the Lord's Supper, never "wine". The taking away of leaven in the Passover feast pointed to the taking away of our sins by the Lord, just as the circumcision of the flesh pointed to the circumcision of the heart, i.e. regeneration.⁹ This truth leads to the following implications: (i) it is not right to insist on using unleavened bread; (ii) it is right to insist that only true believers partake; (iii) it is recommended that one loaf/piece of bread be used to signify the unity of believers.¹⁰ Normally, baptism should precede the Lord's Supper, since church membership should precede fellowship.¹¹ The Lord's Supper should not be celebrated so frequently that its special significance is lost, for the Passover feast which foreshadowed it was celebrated only once a year. On the other hand, the Lord's Supper is a *new* sign of the *new* covenant, and must be celebrated frequently enough to be a means of grace. Having it once a fortnight, or once a month, is recommended.¹² (8. Matt 26:26-29; 1 Cor 11:23-26; 9. 1 Cor. 5:7-8; Col 2:11; 10. 1 Cor 10:17; 11. Matt 28:19-20; Acts 2:41-42; 12. 1 Cor 11:24, 26)
3. The church has a duty to announce that only baptised believers, who are not under church discipline, may take part in the Lord's Supper. In *open communion*, anyone who considers himself/herself a Christian may take part. In *close communion*, members of the same denomination may take part. In *closed communion*, only members of the particular local church may take part. In *restricted communion*, only true believers, regardless of denomination, may take part. *Restricted communion* takes into consideration the facts that: (i) the Lord's Supper is a

special ordinance of the local church;¹³ (ii) it is not open to non-believers;¹⁴ and, (iii) visiting believers are our brethren in Christ.¹⁵ (13. 1 Cor 11:23; 14. 1 Cor 11:29; Matt 7:6; 15. 1 Cor 10:17)

4. The Roman Catholic Church celebrates the mass (instead of the Lord's Supper) by lifting up and adoring the elements, and even keeping them for religious use, claiming that Christ is being crucified afresh. This directly contradicts the meaning and purpose of the Lord's Supper. In effect, it teaches faith in the rituals, and not faith in Christ alone, for salvation. The teaching of *transubstantiation*, which claims that the elements are transformed into Christ's flesh and blood when prayed over by the priest, is nothing but superstition. The worship of those elements is idolatry.¹⁶ The Lutheran belief of *consubstantiation*, which claims that the body and blood of Christ are present "in, under, and along with" the elements must also be rejected. (16. Matt 15:9; Exod 20:4-5)

= What a blessing it is to partake of the Lord's Supper! But you must come to Christ in faith first.

Review Questions

1. What is the meaning of the Lord's Supper?
2. In the first purpose, how does the Lord's Supper nourish the faith of believers?
3. What is the second purpose of the Lord's Supper?
4. What is the third purpose of the Lord's Supper?
5. What do the elements of the bread and the cup symbolise?
6. Give the reason why we must not insist on using wine at the Lord's Supper.
7. What did the taking away of the leaven in the Passover feast point to?
8. How do we determine the frequency of holding the Lord's Supper?
9. What is the practice of *restricted communion* in contrast to *open communion*, *close communion*, and *closed communion*?
10. What are claimed in *transubstantiation* and *consubstantiation*?

Assignment/Discussion

Find out Ulrich Zwingli's view, and John Calvin's view, of the presence of the Lord in the Lord's Supper. One loaf/slice of bread is recommended. What about the grape juice used, should it be in one cup only? Cf. Luke 22:17, 20.

Memory Passage (1 Cor 11:23-26)

23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

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